England. [Appendix — Trade & Commerce]

A

LETTER

OCCASIONED BY

The Application to Parliament,

For farther ENCOURAGEMENT to the

LINEN MANUFACTURES

OF

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

LONDON. MDCCLXXIV.

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For [illegible] MACHINERY to the

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LONDON, MDCCXXIV.

A LETTER, &c.

I CAN without ſcruple give you my ſentiments on the ſubject of the preſent application to Parliament for farther encouragement to the Linen manufactures of Britain and Ireland, becauſe I am convinced,

That the ſtate of theſe manufactures is greatly miſrepreſented.

That even if they were in a declining ſtate, that decline could not be imputed to the cauſes aſſigned, becauſe thoſe cauſes do not exiſt.

That the remedies propoſed would be highly miſchievous to the moſt natural and beneficial manufactures of Britain, to its foreign trade, and to its navigation. And,

That encouraging new manufactures, beyond a certain degree, would in itſelf be prejudicial to the general good of the kingdom.

I am convinced, that the ſtate of the manufactures is much miſrepreſented, becauſe it appears by the Table, N° 9. annexed to the Re-

port of the Committee of the Houſe of Commons, that the Iriſh manufacture of Linens has within the twenty years, from 1752 to 1772, increaſed from an annual medium value, taken for the firſt five years, of £. 762,009, to the ſame taken for the laſt five years, of £. 1,364,885.

No papers of this ſort, relating to the Scotch manufactures, are produced, nor have I yet ſeen any *; but I am apt to ſuppoſe that, if any decline of the manufacture could have been proved by authentic teſtimonials, they would not have been with-held; and I am moreover informed, that from ſome Scotch publications, which give an account of the Linens ſtamped in Scotland, the manufacture appears to be much increaſed in the ſame period of time.

It appears, indeed, by the Table, N° 17, annexed to the Report, that the quantity of Britiſh Linens exported in the ſame period from England were, on a medium for the firſt five years, 579,539 yards, and for the laſt five

* Since this was written, an account is publiſhed, by which, in the ſame period, the Scotch manufactures appear to have increaſed annually above four million yards.

years

years 3,162,026 yards; an increaſe which by no means gives countenance to the complaint of a declining manufacture; eſpecially as we are told by ſome of the evidence examined by the Committee, that the Britiſh manufactures are in ſome articles more demanded for home conſumption than for exportation.

A very ſtrong preſumptive argument in favour of the increaſed home conſumption of Britiſh manufactures ariſes from obſerving, that of the 31,561,536 yards of foreign Linens annually imported in the firſt period of five years, only 7,524,346 were exported; whereas of the 24,988,477 yards imported in the laſt five years, 8,251,193 yards were exported, ſo that there remained in the firſt five years, an annual quantity of above 24 millions; and in the laſt five years, an annual quantity of about 16⅔ millions yards only of foreign Linens for the home conſumption.

Theſe Tables are brought down to the end of 1771; the complaint of a decay in the manufactures is made in the beginning of 1773; if, on producing the like accounts for the year 1772, it ſhould appear that the demand had not been

ſo great as in former years, it would not ſurprize me, becauſe I find, by Table 17, the exportation of the year 1771, to have exceeded all former years above 1,200,000 yards of Britiſh Linens, and above 700,000 yards of Iriſh Linens; an exceſs which muſt neceſſarily have overſtocked the foreign markets to ſuch a degree, as to leſſen the demand of a following year exceedingly; but when I recollect the circumſtances of the ſummer of 1772, which diſcovered to the world in general, what the ſenſible part of the trading world had long lamented, the viſionary foundations on which an exceſſive trade had been raiſed by ſome bold adventurers, and the ruin which fell on them in conſequence of their indiſcretion; I can no longer wonder, that the demand for every ſort of merchandize ſhould then have leſſened, as I believe it did univerſally. An occaſional interruption of trade, eſpecially when the cauſes are ſo obvious, is no proof of a real decay; and I have the ſatisfaction to think, that an enquiry at preſent into the ſtate of the manufactures would produce more agreeable information, than what has been given us by intereſted miſrepreſentation. I am informed there is at preſent a briſk

a briſk demand for thoſe Iriſh manufactures, which loaded the warehouſes of the factors in the ſpring of the year 1773; that they are now ſcarce, and riſing conſiderably in price. This is the natural ſtate of all trades, which can never be properly judged of by conſidering only ſingle years.

If circumſtances are as I have repreſented them, and of which I have no doubt, the ſtate of the manufactures muſt have been greatly miſrepreſented.

I am convinced, that a decline in the manufactures of Britain and Ireland could not be imputed to the cauſes aſſigned; which were,

An increaſed importation of foreign Linens:

An importation of them on too low duties, lower than were intended by the Book of Rates: And,

A fraudulent exportation, by which an higher drawback was received than the goods exported were entitled to.

That an increaſed importation of foreign Linens cannot have cauſed the decline in the Britiſh manufactures, is evident; for it appears by Table, N° 12, that the medium annual im-

portation, from 1752 to 1756, was 31,561,536 yards, which has been ever ſince decreaſing; and the medium annual importation, from 1767 to the end of 1771, was only 24,988,477 yards; ſo that there is really a decreaſe in the importation of above ſix millions and an half yards.

An importation of Linens on lower duties than were intended by the Book of Rates, can as little have contributed to the decline of our home manufactures; for the original intention of the Legiſlature ſeems to have been to raiſe about 26 $\frac{2}{3}$ *per cent.* on the value of foreign Linens imported; and the duties on thoſe Linens * which fall moſt within my knowledge, bear a much greater proportion to their value, and in ſome inſtances are above 50 *per cent.* or half the value; and from informations, which I have received from perſons well informed of the values of thoſe foreign Linens with which I am unacquainted, I am perſuaded they pay a duty equal to the original idea of the compilers of the Book of Rates. Indeed I ſhould have gathered this from the Report of the Committee, as I think there ſeems to be an inconſiſtence in the allegations on this ſubject;

* The Ruſſian.

for

for it is ſaid, that foreign Linens are lower in price than they formerly were; yet they pay as high, and, in many inſtances, an higher duty than they formerly did, and conſequently muſt be of leſs original value. When it is conſidered that foreign Linens pay above one quarter, and, in ſome inſtances, one half of their value in duties, it cannot be thought that too low duties can have cauſed a decline in our home manufactures.

As to the inſinuation (for it is only ſuch, not the leaſt ſhadow of a proof having been brought), that foreign Linens are exported under a denomination different from what they are imported, and ſo receive a drawback higher than they are entitled to, it ſcarce deſerves notice; it amounts to a charge of perjury againſt the exporters; and it is to be wiſhed that the evidence who told the Houſe, he thought it poſſible this might happen, had either avoided ſo invidious an inſinuation, or had been prepared with ſome notorious fact to countenance it: though the thing may be poſſible, it will hardly be thought probable it can have happened in ſuch a degree, as to have

cauſed a decline in the Britiſh manufactures; as, on ſhipping foreign Linens, they are ſubject to ſuch an examination by the officers of the cuſtoms, as may always detect the fraud. You will not now wonder that I am convinced thoſe circumſtances, which have been aſſigned as the cauſes of the decline of the Britiſh and Iriſh manufactures, do not exiſt.

I ſhall now conſider, whether the remedies which have been propoſed for the ſuppoſed decline of the home manufactures, would not be detrimental to the moſt natural and beneficial manufactures of Britain, to its foreign trade, and to its navigation.

The principal remedies which have been propoſed, indeed the only ones which could act in oppoſition to the ſuppoſed evils of an increaſed importation, and too low duties on foreign Linens; and fraudulent exports of them; are to increaſe duties, and to aboliſh drawbacks.

The difference of price between imported Linens, and home-made ones of the ſame ſorts, are, by the evidence in the Report, made to amount to ten, twelve, and even twenty *per cent.*

cent. on ſome articles. An additional duty of this amount therefore muſt be laid, in order to put the foreign and home manufactures on an equal footing; it ſeems to be admitted, that the finer ſorts of Holland Linens are already ſo charged with duty, as not to interfere with our home manufactures; the great object aimed at ſeems to be the coarſer ſorts of foreign Linens, which you muſt increaſe in price ten, twelve, or twenty *per cent.* for their benefit. You muſt load with duties, not the fantaſtic wants of elegance and refinement, but the neceſſary clothing of the laborious poor: the country people, who, as we are told, now wear coat, waiſtcoat, and breeches of coarſe Ruſſia Linen. The day-labourer; the waggoner; he who in theſe times already pays an advanced price for every morſel of food, yet ſtill works at the loweſt wages; tis he muſt pay a very conſiderable advance on his clothing, and on that of his family. Every man who now toils at the forge in Birmingham, or Sheffield; who watches his flock on the downs; whoſe induſtry at Norwich, at Mancheſter, in thoſe numerous looms in the North and Weſt, which ſtill pro-

duce

duce our beneficial woollen manufactures; he who is buried in the mines of Cornwall and of Derby; all theſe muſt pay an additional price for a conſiderable part of the clothing of themſelves and their families. Is this poſſible? or, if it is poſſible, can this be done unleſs by an increaſe of wages? And it is evident, that whatever increaſes the expences of the labours of agriculture, muſt increaſe the price of proviſions; and ſo theſe additional duties muſt operate doubly, in the article of proviſion, and in that of clothing, againſt the manufacturer. It is plain, that the manufactures would be injured, by thus increaſing the expence of the manufacturer: but they would not only be injured in this manner by this meaſure; for conſtant experience has ſhewn, that any check on the importation of foreign manfactures is found to check the exports of our own ſtaple, and moſt advantageous, manufactures; the benefits of commercial intercourſe muſt be mutual, and, if we throw additional difficulties on the importation of foreign manufactures, foreign ſtates will find means of Retaliation; an art which the German ſtates are ready in the practice of towards one another,

and

and which they may be eaſily brought to exerciſe againſt us.

That our foreign trade would be injured, and very materially injured, by this meaſure of increaſing duties, and withholding drawbacks, is ſo evident as to need very little to be ſaid on the ſubject; if ten, twelve, or twenty *per cent.* additional duty was to be laid on foreign Linens, and no drawback to be allowed, the additional duty would check our importations, would conſequently leſſen the demand, and reduce the prices in the manufacturing countries; the taking away drawbacks, which are now allowed on exporting from England, would, together with a reduced price, render the advantage of traffic immediately between our own colonies and the manufacturing countries ſo great, and would give every maritime nation in Europe ſo conſiderable an advantage over us, as would much overpay the dangers of a contraband trade; and on ſo long a coaſt as that of North America, it would be impoſſible for the utmoſt diligence to prevent ſmuggling.

The aboliſhing drawbacks would, I apprehend, deſtroy what is now a very conſiderable manu-

manufacture, the Printing trade; ſince they are already arrived to ſo conſiderable a ſkill in printing Linens in Germany and other places, that if any advantages now enjoyed ſhould be taken from our printing trade, Foreign artiſts would be too powerful rivals for us to contend with.

As our navigation depends on our foreign trade, whatever injures one, is detrimental to the other; ſo that nothing need be added to ſhew, that our navigation, the nurſery of our ſeamen, would be prejudiced by the meaſures propoſed for the relief of the Linen manufactures.

It now remains, that I ſhould conſider how far the encouraging new manufactures, beyond a certain degree, would be a meaſure in itſelf prejudicial to the general good of the kingdom.

It may be here remarked, though it is indeed evident, that all manufactures are not equally beneficial to a country; and that no manufacture is or can be ſo beneficial to a country, under the preſent circumſtances of Great Britain, as agriculture is. But of all manufactures, thoſe are certainly the moſt advantageous which work up the original produce of the country;

country; ſuch is the woollen manufacture here: next to theſe are thoſe which take foreign commodities in their raweſt ſtate, and work them up to the higheſt pitch of finiſhing; ſuch are our Birmingham and Sheffield manufactures: after theſe may perhaps follow our rope-makers, as they work the hemp from its raweſt ſtate, and as their manufacture is ſo eſſentially neceſſary to our navigation. I am not conſcious of any partiality in placing Linen manufactures in Great Britain in a much lower order with reſpect to their uſefulneſs.

The reaſon why I ſuppoſe agriculture more beneficial than any manufacture, is, not only becauſe it produces the very ſtaff of our life, which alone would be ſufficient to give it the pre-eminence; but farther, becauſe, from the nature of their employment, the perſons engaged in it are the moſt conſtantly induſtrious; engaged in labour in the open air; ſubject to variety of weather, and of ſeaſons; the leaſt luxurious; the moſt hardy; and conſequently the moſt uſeful of the inhabitants of our Iſland; from theſe, in the day of danger, we muſt recruit our armies; the manufacturer, ſickly from

the confinement of his buſineſs, and the debauchery of his leiſure, would fall an early ſacrifice to the hardſhips of a camp.

It is, I believe almoſt without exception, obſervable, that the poors rates are higheſt where manufactures are eſtabliſhed, yet the wages of a manufacturer are higher than thoſe of a labourer in agriculture; but the misfortune is, that what a manufacturer earns in one part of a week, he ſpends in the other; where a flouriſhing manufacture is eſtabliſhed, there is more diſſoluteneſs, and more miſery, than among country labourers.

Theſe are very material reaſons why, in a country whoſe manners are thoſe of the modern Engliſh, one would not wiſh to tempt the poor from the labours of agriculture; yet, in a populous country, there may be more hands than can be employed in the field; and, to give bread to thoſe who are willing to labour, it may be neceſſary to eſtabliſh manufactures; they ſeem to be uſeful in the order I have ranked them, and they ſhould be encouraged in proportion to their uſefulneſs.

Much

Much more may be ſaid for the expediency of a Linen manufacture in Ireland, than in Britain; the Iriſh Linen manufacture has had great encouragement, at the expence, and to the deſtruction, of the trade in Holland's Linens; it has flouriſhed under that encouragement to a degree that might ſatisfy the warmeſt friend to Ireland; the number of manufacturers is ſo greatly increaſed, that ſuch accidental leſſenings of demand as happen at times in all trades, muſt throw numbers out of employment, who have not perhaps been ſo provident as they ſhould have been in their buſier years. Theſe are the objects of compaſſion; it is not ſurely unreaſonable to think they ſhould look, for their temporary relief, to thoſe who have raiſed almoſt princely fortunes from their labours.

The Britiſh manufactures of Linen have had parliamentary encouragement; they have flouriſhed under it. Foreign Linens have been loaded with additional duties; it is true, theſe duties may have been impoſed as aids to the revenue, and not with an immediate view to aſſiſt the Britiſh manufactures; yet they muſt have operated to their aſſiſtance, and, if we may judge from

from their effects, they have done ſo. Within theſe laſt twenty years, the exportation of Britiſh Linens has increaſed in the proportion of thirty to ſix; that is, it is now five times as great as it was twenty years ago. Within the ſame period of time, the importation of foreign Linens has decreaſed above 6½ million yards, one fifth part of the importation of twenty years ago. Surely the Britiſh manufacturers of Linen have no reaſon to complain of want of encouragement; and when we conſider the preſent ſtate of agriculture, and of our elder manufactures, it may be doubtful whether this manufacture has not attained to that degree, far beyond which it might be highly impolitic to wiſh to extend it. The nation is not ſuppoſed to be more populous than it was; there is certainly more land in cultivation: can it be expedient to add new temptations to the labourer to turn manufacturer?